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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington, D.C. 20520

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January 29, 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR LIEUTENANT GENERAL BRENT SCOWCROFT
THE WHITE HOUSESubject: Department of State's Comments
and Recommendations on NSSM 212

In response to your request of January 10, 1975, the Department of State's formal views and recommendations on NSSM 212: U.S. Security Assistance to the Republic of China, are hereby transmitted.


George S. Springsteen

Executive Secretary

Attachment:

Paper on NSSM 212

Declassified/Released on 8/4/87
under provisions of E.O. 13526
by A. Scovell, National Security Advisor

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STATE DEPARTMENT VIEWS ON NSSM 212

Substance of the NSSM

As a principal contributor to NSSM 212, US Security Assistance to the Republic of China, the Department of State believes that the paper provides the necessary background, analysis and policy options for a decision on the subject.

The paper represents a departure from the customary military approach to the issue to highlight the problem of reconciling the contradictory objectives of assuring Taiwan's security and stability while advancing normalization with the PRC. It provides four options which range from minimizing arms supply as an obstacle to normalization to maximizing ROC security and confidence. The options are: 1) complete cut-off of ROC access to US weapons; 2) freezing ROC access to US weapons at current levels; 3) limited ROC access to new weapons; 4) substantial ROC access to new weapons.

The paper emphasizes the extent to which ROC access to US military equipment is related to popular confidence and stability on Taiwan, noting that this relationship is likely to assume greater importance as other elements of Taiwan's security equation change. While the paper detects some greater ROC appreciation of the deterrent value of political arrangements, it postulates that it will take at least several more years of careful conditioning before the ROC can be weaned away from an essentially military view of its security. In the meantime, carefully regulated supply of equipment represents a means to cushion the impact on the ROC of further normalization of US-PRC relations.

The Paper's Limitations

It is difficult to provide precise guidelines to govern arms supply, because of a two-fold problem of (1) resolving contradictory objectives toward Taiwan and the PRC and (2) the difficulty in predicting with precision how either Chinese party will react to our decisions on specific weapons systems. Some extreme cases are obvious, e.g., the provision of offensive aircraft or long-range

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missiles to the ROC would provoke the PRC to the point of seriously endangering normalization, but there are a number of cases where our judgment cannot be confident. An example of this discussed below is the Harpoon missile. Neither can we assess with great precision the PRC threat. The assumptions used in the paper appear reasonable but not definitive. Nevertheless, certain specific ROC shortcomings, especially in naval and air capabilities, are identified.

All but the first option provide essentially general guidelines for our handling of arms supply to the ROC. While Annex 3 illustrates how specific weapons might relate to options, there will be a continuing requirement for finer tuning of the selected option in light of then prevailing circumstances.

The Options and the Department's Recommendation

We believe the first option -- a complete cut-off of ROC access to US equipment either abruptly or over the next three to five years -- would be unacceptable because it would seriously threaten stability on Taiwan and possibly cause the PRC to miscalculate our intentions toward Taiwan. Implementation of this option at this point would risk disintegration of the social order on Taiwan, desperate ROC acts which could complicate our relations with the PRC and PRC threats or, less likely, use of force against Taiwan. Any of these would open us to charges of irresponsible behavior and confront us with serious problems at home and abroad.

At the other extreme, we believe option four -- substantial ROC access to new weapons -- should be rejected as contributing to ROC offensive capabilities, adding to the ROC's economic burdens, disruptive of normalization of relations with the PRC and therefore completely contrary to our present course. At least from our standpoint it is clear that arms supply to the ROC cannot be an open-ended process: ROC/PRC parity is illusory and a very substantial ROC defensive capability is within reach. We see the disadvantages of option two -- freezing ROC access to current types and levels -- as outweighing its advantages. Taiwan's ability to weather further changes in its relationship with the US will greatly depend on whether or not the leaders and public remain reasonably confident that the island

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remains secure from attack regardless of its formal diplomatic standing. Implementation of option two at this time would represent a drastic departure from present practice. It would be read on Taiwan as ending the possibility of maintaining a credible deterrent against the PRC's growing military capabilities and as a marked lessening of US concern in Taiwan's prospects for survival. The resultant erosion of confidence could lead to the damaging consequences discussed under option one. Moreover, the progressive deterioration of the ROC's deterrent capability could weaken an important component of the restraint which has characterized the PRC position on Taiwan.

The Department believes that option three -- limited ROC access to new weapons -- should be chosen as best calculated to promote our China policy goals. This option is presented in lower and upper range. We regard the lower range as providing the best balance between accommodating PRC sensitivities and fulfilling ROC psychological needs and deterrent requirements. The upper range runs unnecessary risks with the PRC and is not required to maintain a respectable ROC deterrent against the PRC attack and requisite confidence on Taiwan.

The Harpoon Issue

1. The Argument For

The paper notes that provision of the Harpoon missile to the ROC represents a borderline case under our preferred option. The military argument for providing Harpoon is a strong one. PRC naval capabilities in the Taiwan Straits are growing rapidly, highlighted by the presence of an increasing number of Styx-equipped patrol boats. The ROC is increasingly concerned over its inability to counter the Styx and views the Harpoon as the perfect answer. Moreover, a Harpoon capability would significantly improve the ROC's ability to defend against a PRC amphibious invasion attempt. These considerations have led to insistent ROC requests for these surface-to-surface missiles and have assured that the ROC will view our handling of the issue as an important indication of our intentions toward Taiwan. Failure to meet the ROC request will be additionally complicated by our already expressed willingness to supply Harpoon to a number of other nations, including South Korea.

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2. The Argument Against

However, there is considerable risk that the PRC would react strongly to provision to the ROC of such a highly visible and technologically advanced weapon that more than matched the Styx. Peking might view the move as casting doubt on our willingness to proceed toward normalization on mutually acceptable terms. In any event, agreeing to the ROC request at this time would not set a favorable stage for the President's forthcoming PRC visit. Another complication is the long lead time on delivery of the weapon. The present estimate is that under the highest priority conditions, earliest delivery to the ROC would be sometime in 1977. That time could be even more inopportune for our relationship with the PRC.

The valid military requirements for Harpoon might be met by ROC acquisition from third country sources. The ROC has recently purchased several Gabriel missiles from Israel and has a firm commitment that it can have the French-Italian Ottomat missile. While both are inferior to the Harpoon, they are more or less comparable to the Styx missile.

3. The Department's Conclusion

The Department believes that the weight of the argument is against providing Harpoons to the ROC at the present time. The ROC request has been pending for the better part of a year and our footdragging has undoubtedly lowered ROC expectations for the missile. We believe that continued procrastination rather than a flat turn-down represents the best means of conveying our position to the ROC. At a time when procrastination is no longer possible, we might wish to provide the ROC a less controversial package to offset its disappointment. Moreover, it should be made clear to both our people on Taiwan and to the ROC that we no longer invariably oppose ROC acquisition of military supplies from third country sources. In the interim, approvals of other weapons and performance consistent with the lower range of option three should be somewhat reassuring to the ROC.

The complexities of the Harpoon issue highlight the need earlier mentioned to continue to examine ROC weapon requests on a case by case basis regardless of the option selected.

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